

43rd ASSEMBLY DISTRICT • ASSEMBLY DEMOCRATIC CAUCUS CHAIR

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Jorgensen's Journal: Offers Food for Thought On Childhood Hunger

Turns out, mom was right. Again.

Breakfast is, in fact, the most important meal of the day. Doctors and researchers have discovered that your morning bowl of oatmeal or scrambled egg boosts your concentration and even helps you maintain a healthy body weight.

But, while you and I choose whether or not to start our day off right, far too many children don't have that choice. Studies show that one in five Wisconsin kids struggle with hunger, often going without breakfast.

As a parent of young children, I find that statistic heartbreaking. I know that, when children are hungry, they have trouble concentrating, lack energy, and struggle academically.

As a state lawmaker, I find the issue of hunger very motivating. After researching options, I know this is a problem we can fix simply and inexpensively.

You see, Wisconsin is currently ranked 50th, dead last in the nation, in schools' participation in the federal school breakfast program. As a result, more than 162,000 students in need are eating free or reduced-price lunches at school, but may not be getting breakfast.

I called school administrators working in districts that weren't offering breakfast, and asked what we could do to encourage them to "get with the program." Their answer was simple: it's a matter of money.

While the breakfast program is funded largely by the federal government – at a rate of about \$1.20 per meal, the state is expected to kick in something. Unfortunately, Wisconsin only offers a reimbursement rate of 15 cents per breakfast, woefully short of our neighboring states' rates. And, after more than \$1.3 billion in state funding cuts, school districts are having a hard time coming up with the difference.

So, this session, I've proposed a bill called "Food for Thought." It would take our state reimbursement rate from 15 cents per meal to 30 cents. This modest change could make a big



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difference for the poorest school districts that cannot scrape together the money to offer breakfast and – most importantly – for children struggling with hunger.

Let's do what we can to give our kids the best start in life, the best start each day – and end childhood hunger in Wisconsin.

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